

## **From The Voice of a Teacher—a Domestic Violence Survivor: The Importance of Employer Support**

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### **Abstract**

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*The case study discussed in this article is the third of a female educator who suffered intimate partner violence (IPV) at the hands of her now ex-husband for a period of 18 months before she escaped. This study presents the employer support she encountered by her immediate supervisors who engaged the assistance of higher education professionals to create and implement guidelines and processes to provide support. This case study brings awareness for school instructional leaders, managers of schools, and other school professionals of the necessity to intervene by establishing workplace policies, guidelines and processes to aid an employee who may be experiencing domestic violence. It will provide a look into the types of support that instructional school leaders, managers of schools, and other school professionals consider as a means to help an employee, who is a domestic violence victim. It could make all the difference for survival.*

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**Keywords:** Intimate Partner Violence, Domestic Violence, Domestic Violence Indicators, Domestic Violence Statistics, Employee Guidelines, Workplace Policy, Prevention Intervention Support

### **1. Introduction**

The information for this study is a record from the same subject and incident featured in the first and second case studies, where the victim tells how she lived “In the Dark Shadows” (Alaniz & De Los Santos, 2015) and how she escaped after “The Final Blow” (Alaniz & De Los Santos, 2016). The survivor of domestic violence believes that if it happened to her, a highly educated professional woman, it is happening to numerous other professional women, especially women in today's classrooms throughout the United States. During the 18-month ordeal as a domestic violence victim, the subject experienced a dramatic change in her job performance and the quality of her work deteriorated as she exercised very little or no dedication towards her work responsibilities. She could not because her perpetrator would not let her conduct and maintain her work responsibilities; otherwise, she would be met with physical harm if she went against his authority. The subject declared that during this brutal period of her life, she remained silent for fear of death as threatened numerous times by her then-husband, if she told. The subject exclaimed she only "existed."

This survivor from domestic violence ultimately credits her best friend Teresa for rescuing her, and recognizes her employer for providing the support she needed after the escape to resume to normalcy in her professional work life. This support included the implementation of a safety plan among other employee welfare and security measures.

The efforts and work of employer brought a dramatic improvement to her work performance; she experienced an increase in self-esteem and confidence; and she reported assurance of feeling safe and supported easing her fear of job loss. Today, being a victim of domestic violence is no longer her shameful dirty little secret. She is a survivor.

### 1.1 Research Questions

The three questions that should be examined by instructional school leaders, managers of schools, and other school professionals are: (1) What is domestic violence and what are the indicators exhibited by an employee who is a victim of intimate partner violence? (2) What type of workplace policy including guidelines and processes can be developed that can serve to intervene and support an employee who is a victim of intimate partner violence? and (3) Is there an awareness of community support systems available for employee victims of domestic violence to recommend? This information is essential for instructional school leaders, managers of schools, and other school professionals in order to extend help and support to an employee who may be a victim of intimate partner violence or domestic violence as is more commonly known.

### 1.2 Definition of Terms

According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV), domestic violence is the willful intimidation, physical assault, battery, sexual assault, and/or other abusive behavior as part of a systematic pattern of power and control perpetrated by one intimate partner against another. It includes physical violence, sexual violence, psychological violence, emotional abuse and stalking. The frequency and severity of domestic violence can span from a one-time occurrence to many chronic and severe incidences over a number of years. The one relentless factor of DV is the perpetrator's unflinching efforts to maintain power and control over the partner (NCADV, 2015). In simple terms, domestic violence is a form of coercive behavior, including acts or threatened acts, used by a perpetrator to obtain power and control over the person with whom the perpetrator shares a close relationship. This coercive behavior includes, but is not limited to, physical intimidation or injury, verbal mistreatment and insults, emotional and/or psychological coercion, economic control, harassment and stalking (Workplaces Respond to Domestic and Sexual Violence, A National Resource, n.d.)

### 1.3 Domestic Violence in the News

Domestic violence also referred to as intimate partner violence (IPV) caught national attention in 2014 (Binder, 2014). The matter of domestic violence drew attention when a video tape surfaced showing then-Baltimore Raven football player Ray Rice punching his fiancée, Janay Palmer, unconscious in an elevator. The video was made public on September 8, 2014 and Ray Rice was fired from the team shortly after (Frantz, 2014). High profile cases create awareness, but domestic violence is a problem of epidemic proportion. A "haunting" 30-second commercial viewed by millions of people during the Super Bowl XLIX in 2015 sought to bring awareness to the issue of DV through an anti-domestic violence campaign titled, *No More* (Lacey-Bordeaux, 2015). This advertising campaign was a good start for educating and making others aware of this social epidemic. Domestic violence did not always make the headlines before this incident brought domestic violence to the spotlight. Since the high profile domestic violence case involving Ray Rice in 2014, stories of domestic violence in the news appear to be more common especially among athletes and celebrities.

It is not surprising to learn that many domestic violence news stories have involved educators or incidents occurring in schools. In March 2017, a DV case made news headlines. An instructional teacher's aide from Albany, New York died after her husband allegedly threw gasoline on her and set her on fire ("Teacher's Union", 2017). The following month, April 2017, the national news media reported that a gunman entered an elementary school in San Bernardino, 765California. The man fatally shot his estranged wife, a teacher, inside her classroom. Killed in the murder-suicide at North Park Elementary School were the man, his estranged wife, and one 8-year-old student, who was in close proximity to the teacher. A second student, a 9-year-old, was wounded and was in stable condition in a local hospital (Hamasaki & Simon, 2017). And yet, another domestic violence murder involving an educator was reported in September 2017. The husband of a second grade teacher in Revere, Massachusetts was charged with her murder. The evidence suggests that this teacher's death was a result of DV. According to the news article, the teacher suffered blunt force trauma to the head, sharp force injuries to the neck, and asphyxiation (Dier, 2017). Most recently, in October 2017, the body of a social studies teacher was found in a shallow grave in a secluded field in Damascus, Maryland. She had been shot in the back of the head and her boyfriend was charged with her murder (Richman & Michaels, 2017).

These are tragic examples of domestic violence and its fatal effect in school communities across the United States. As we have learned about IPV victims, many are victims of physical violence at the hands of an intimate partner and they suffer in silence and choose not to share their secret with anyone for one or more reasons: (1) they are ashamed or embarrassed about it; (2) it is taboo to talk about it, (3) speaking out goes against their culture or religion beliefs; (4) fear of being blamed; (5) economic dependence, or (6) they are fearful it could bring severe physical harm and possible death should the perpetrator discover she has told someone. For this reason, it is imperative that instructional school leaders, school managers and other school professionals who supervise employees have a workplace policy and an implementation plan created to help an employee domestic violence victim. For an employee who is an IPV victim, being aware that there are workplace policies and guidelines in place for support can be the catalyst to empower the victim to come out of the dark shadows leading to survival from domestic violence.

#### **1.4 Statistics**

Data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) astoundingly reveal that 95% of reported domestic violence cases are women. Domestic violence is a widespread epidemic that strikes about 4 million people a year (Pyrilllis, 2014). According to the CDC, nearly 1 in 4 women have experienced severe physical violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime (CDC, 2011). Published in 2011, the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NIPSVS) 2010 collected data on the national prevalence of Intimate Partner Violence, Sexual Violence, and stalking among women and men in the United States. The NIPSVS showed that more than one-third of women in the United States (35.6% or approximately 42.4 million) have experienced rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner at some point in their lifetime. One in 3 women (32.9%) has experienced physical violence by an intimate partner and nearly 1 in 10 (9.4%) has been raped by an intimate partner in her lifetime. Approximately 5.9%, or almost 7.0 million women in the United States, reported experiencing these forms of violence by an intimate partner in the 12 months prior to taking the survey (CDC, 2011b). Other findings indicate that intimate partner violence causes far-reaching health issues beyond immediate injury. Its effects are massive aside from physical and psychological injuries—it affects their children, their families, their employment and productivity, as well as brings difficulties with finances, homelessness, childcare, and role disruption (Javaherian, et al., 2007). Domestic violence has profound personal, health, and economic consequences for victims and additionally brings serious consequences for the workplace.

A CDC study published report in July 2012 found that approximately one in ten victims of IPV-related homicides encountered some form of domestic violence in the previous month before their death. This indicates that there could have been a likely opportunity for intervention for those deceased women (Domonoske, 2017).

#### **1.5 Domestic Violence Indicators**

Domestic violence does not discriminate as it affects individuals from all economic levels, educational, cultural, age, gender, race, religious demographics, and heterosexual and same-sex relationships (Workplaces Respond, n.d.). It is important that instructional school leaders, school managers and school professionals recognize the signs of employee domestic violence victims and initiate a conversation addressing first concern for employee work performance and then asking, "Are you OK?" if a number of indicators or a pattern of recurring indicators are present. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2014, 2011, 2011b), the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (2015), The National Domestic Violence Hotline (2011), and The National Institute of Justice (2007), among others have identified common indicators found in abusive relationships. Below is a list of signs that an employee in distress resulting from domestic violence could exhibit, including (but not limited):

- Changes in work schedule, such as arriving late or leaving early.
- Poor or unsatisfactory work when work had been satisfactorily previously. Employee production suffers and lack of work quality is evident.
- Unexpected and unexplained visits at the workplace from the spouse or partner.
- Continually and incessantly receiving phone calls during work hours from the spouse or partner.
- Employee exhibits unexplained emotional outbursts for no apparent reason (Freifeld, 2011, Recognize Signs of Workplace Violence section, para 5).
- Unexplained absences - Employee is frequently absent from work, especially on Mondays.
- Mysterious, unexplained or frequent bruising, fractures, sprains and other injuries such as fresh scars or minor cuts or burns - Employee often gives excuses like falling down in the backyard, missing a step, tripping, etc.

- Dejected; low self-esteem; unhappy - Employee often isolates self at work and becomes defensive when given feedback. Looks sad or unhappy.
- Calculating and controlling demeanor - Employee seems passive but will control work environment to prevent upsetting affairs at home. That is, employee will clock in and out precisely on time and does not stay to work late.
- Inadequate; incapable - Employee believes she is not capable and is inadequate when given new assignments or asked to participate or contribute to a project. Displays a negative attitude towards workload and work issues.
- Indication of tremendous pressure or stress - Employee appears uncertain most of the time; pressure or stress is obvious, physically as well as emotionally. Depression, fatigue, headaches, or backaches are common reasons for absence from work and/or diminished work performance.
- Hypervigilance; preoccupied; always in a state of alertness - Employee appears nervous, worried, tense, anxious, fidgety, and "startles" easily. Employee frequently looks over shoulder and prefers keeping with familiar work environment.
- Obscured; out-of-sight; and segregated- Employee has few, if any friends; often eats alone, and does not participate in any outside work activities or social activities. Employee tries to be "invisible" at work. Avoids interaction with others.
- Customary; traditional; conventional values - Employee believes career/occupation/job is secondary to her partners' and will maneuver the workload and work day to ensure job never interferes with the family and home. Employee is reluctant to accept any projects or assignments that will clash with this value and often misses career opportunities because of this.
- Intense codependent relationship - Employee is regularly escorted to and from work on an almost daily basis, and is checked on by the partner repeatedly during the day either by phone or in person (Domestic Violence Indicators for Managers section, 2015, para 1)

## 1.6 Rationale

Instructional school leaders and school managers have an obligation to ensure effective “management of the organization, operation, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment”, according to the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standard (ISLLC) #3 (Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2008). To accomplish this responsibility, instructional school leaders and school managers should be able to identify and implement practices that will promote safety in the workplace and respond effectively to the needs of victimized employees of domestic violence. Most importantly, a concern for instructional school leaders and school managers should be that the majority population of classroom teachers across the United States is predominately female. For this reason and more, it is critical to recognize that domestic violence (DV) does affect schools. Being prepared to provide in the workplace awareness about domestic violence and creating policy and procedures to address DV are important. The development of policies and procedures will provide guidance to those in the school community in their response to help a fellow colleague. Moreover, this will create a climate where healthy relationships are fostered and an employee in an abusive domestic situation is responded to and treated in a way that supports the victimized employee. Again, the creation and implementation of such policy could be the "light at the end of the tunnel" that empowers the victimized employee to meet and disclose their greatest fear: Being found out that they are a domestic violence victim. Lastly, instructional school leaders and school managers should not assume that to become involved in the intervention prevention and support of employees facing domestic violence is meddling into their personal lives. Instead, they should assume that this action is serving as the conduit to those who can help the employee. Doing so could result in saving a victimized employee's life. It could make all the difference.

## 2. Method

A phenomenological research design was the method utilized to investigate the experiences of the domestic violence survivor and the system supports provided to her by her employer. The design of this case study concentrates on the "meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of domestic violence for this IPV survivor. This design allowed the IPV survivor's voice to be heard allowing her experiences to be validated.

In a phenomenological approach, as explained by Portney & Watkins (2000), the IPV survivor's experience of her escape from the violent, controlling, and physical and emotional abusive husband and her interactions with her employer following her coming out of the shadows and revealing her dirty little secret became the catalyst for the development and implementation of various types of supports she received from her employer as told within her own social and personal contexts. This serves to provide valuable information from which the authors can conceptualize the experience of this domestic violence survivor to gain an understanding of the support systems that served to help this survivor resume her professional and personal life to normalcy.

## **2.1 Subject**

This study is a case study of a female between the ages of 50 - 60 who experienced intimate partner violence (IPV) at the hands of her now ex-husband during their 18-month marriage. The female is an assistant professor at a state university in a southern state of the United States. She holds postgraduate degrees with thirty years of experience in the field of education—26 of those years in public school education having served in the roles of classroom teacher, counselor, educational diagnostician, school administrator, and district level administrator.

## **2.2 Data Collection**

The data was collected using an interview method. A survivor of intimate partner violence was asked to tell her story about her personal experiences regarding the intervention and support provided by her employer. Her story begins with the initial telephone call to her employer, not only to notify him of her intended absence from work because she did not have transportation to travel to complete the final week of the semester, but the most difficult news of all- to let him know that she was now a resident in a shelter for battered and abused women located 69 miles from campus. For the first time, her employer learned that she had escaped from a violent home situation, which was unbeknownst to him or anyone in her workplace. In this interview, the IPV survivor shares her experiences of coming out of the shadows and tells of the support systems that her employer exercised after her reveal. This IPV survivor concludes her story by speaking about her experience in seeking to redeem herself in rebuilding her lost credibility amongst her workplace colleagues as she stepped out from the shadows and went public about her survival from domestic violence.

## **3. Findings**

Providing support to a domestic violence victim by the respective employer is crucial. Research has shown that IPV victims who abandon or escape from an abusive relationship are at a 75% greater risk of getting killed by their abuser than those victims who remain in the relationship (Kasperkevic, 2014). Not surprising that fear and safety are genuine concerns that preoccupy IPV victims who leave an abusive relationship.

The workplace may be the only place a victim receives long-term support. Findings indicate that support systems in the workplace lead to employee retention and can be used to establish a safe haven for the IPV victim (Zink & Sill, 2007). The support systems that can be provided by an employer are through the supervisor's compassion; managers' and coworkers' support by screening telephone calls; and partnering the IPV victim with another employee for support. Providing a positive and healthy work environment and encouraging the use of an employee assistance program. Additionally, making allowances for vacation time or sick leave, flexible work arrangements, awareness of rights of an abused employee, and safety planning for the victim including providing escort service to and from vehicle (Katula, 2012). All of these support systems were exercised by the employer in support of the IPV victim, the subject of the study.

### **3.1 Her Story**

During the ordeal as a domestic violence victim, the subject experienced a dramatic change in her job performance and the quality of her work deteriorated as she exercised very little or no dedication towards her work responsibilities. She could not and he would not let her conduct and maintain her work responsibilities; otherwise, she would be met with physical harm if she went against his authority. The subject declared that during this brutal period of her life, she remained silence for fear of death due to numerous times of death by her then-husband, if she told. The subject exclaimed she only "existed." After her escape from the violent home she mentally referred to as "the dungeon," the subject became a temporary resident of a shelter for battered and abused women. It was at this safe place that the subject received intervention and support, in addition to the intervention and support of her Employer that paved the way for her to become independent again. It made a difference in her road to recovery.

The following narrative is from the voice of a teacher, the subject of this case study. This is her story, which she refers to as "The Survivor."

On a cold early December morning, I was picked up at a police station by a domestic violence advocate to be driven to an undisclosed location to enter a shelter for battered and abused women. Entering this shelter was to become one of the most humbling experiences I had experienced.

I recall sitting in the front seat of the vehicle as I was being driven to the safe house feeling numb; still in shock and in disbelief that I had managed to escape from domestic violence. However, numerous thoughts raced in my mind of things I needed to do as soon as I could such as contacting my two adult children to let them know not to worry about me that I was safe. This news would prove to be shocking and troubling to them when they learned I had been living a new married life rife in domestic violence. I had done a good job hiding the telltale marks of physical abuse and appearing that I was happily married.

I also needed to call my boss. I worried as to what I was going to tell him. What words would I use to explain that I was going to be absent from work all week? I worried as to how he was going to take the news since I still had one full week of classes left in the semester and I could not get to work. I had no car and I only had one set of casual clothes to wear. The only personal clothing belongings I owned sat neatly folded inside a small plastic kitchen liner bag as I learned that I could not take my backpack in to the shelter with me. Those were my mere possessions as I left "the dungeon" with very little clothes that could fit in a backpack and had no money in my possession because the violent then-husband had full control of our finances, and I had no transportation because he had sold my vehicle upon marriage. I also knew that my work performance was sub-par and had deteriorated significantly in the past 18 months. I knew there were numerous complaints about me from students, other faculty and department colleagues. I never returned telephone calls nor responded to email messages. All this was due to the fact that I was married to a controlling violent man who refused to allow me to fulfill my work obligations. I knew I had messed up my credibility in my workplace.

I knew my boss was not going to be supportive of me so I planned how I would respond. I desperately needed to remain employed now. Even though I heard through the grapevine that people, students and colleagues alike, were complaining about me, no one ever stopped to ask how I was doing. In meetings everyone avoided me since I was busy texting messages to my abusive then-husband or stepping out of the meeting room to answer his numerous calls. As soon as the meeting was over, I left quickly. I did not mingle. But at the same time, no one sought me to stop me to talk to me. My horrible work performance was never addressed.

Other things I needed to do, I mentally noted I had to contact the human resources department to cancel my direct deposit, and to find a way to get to my bank to close the joint account in which I was the primary account holder. After my mind quieted about the "must do" tasks, I realized that I was in disbelief that I was finally out! I had managed to escape, with the help of my dear friend Teresa, to leave the violent marriage I had endured for eighteen months. I sat humbled but worried as to how quickly I could communicate with my children and my boss. I assured myself that I would soon talk to them and prayed for the words I needed to say to them.

Calling my employer was one of the most difficult calls I had to make simply because of my situation and knowing that I was not in good standing with him about my declined work performance or any of the other matters everyone else was complaining about. It was true. There had truly been a significant change in my behavior at work but everyone must have been too busy to stop me and ask me what was going on with me. Anyhow, I managed to speak to him on the phone. I told him I was in a shelter and had no transportation to get to work. I was not certain about my life circumstances because I had yet to retain an attorney. He listened to what I had to say and he told me I could cancel my classes the final week and directed me to make sure that final grades were posted on time. He advised me to get in touch with him after the holidays so that we could schedule a date and time to meet.

During my time at the shelter, my thoughts constantly replayed the events of the night I decided to escape. I was being left alone so I secretly planned how I was going to accomplish this feat. I was running away from domestic violence once and for all.

Connecting with my friend Teresa one month earlier through an unexpected answered telephone call at work, brought me the confidence that I could get out of my situation. I just needed the perfect time to do so, a time when I would not be at risk of violence. Armed with a safety plan provided to me by Teresa in a disguised email (which she obtained from the women's shelter where I would go live), I mentally planned my escape. Each week that I secretly managed to call Teresa from work gave me the confidence I needed. She helped boost my self-esteem by reminding me how intelligent I truly was. Teresa was familiar with the tactics that abusers use on their victims so she spoke to me by giving me words to empower me, and it worked!

Exactly one month later, an opportunity for me to escape presented itself. I did get a beating earlier that day but it did not matter because I knew I was leaving that night and that was the last time he would hurt me. I sent a text to Teresa when I discovered he had left my cell phone unattended in the bedroom while he took a nap in the living room. Thankfully, Teresa responded immediately and we agreed that I would text her as soon as I was leaving "the dungeon." She would immediately leave her home 20 miles away to go pick me up. So we sealed the deal to meet at a nearby public location where I would walk to. She would drive me to the police station in another city so that I could check into the shelter where they already knew about my domestic violence situation and my name was on their waiting list for a bed.

I could not take much, as I had to carry my few belongings with me to the destination where I was to meet my life-saver, my dear friend Teresa. I walked out of "the dungeon" shortly after 7 p.m. as soon as I was sure that his truck was out of sight and he was on his way to meet his son. I immediately collected the most important necessities I needed such as my winter coat, gloves and hat, a flashlight, my work laptop computer bag, all necessary work documents for my semester courses, and my cap and gown regalia as I was expected to participate in commencement the following Saturday. I quickly got my backpack containing a few clothing items and toiletries that I was able to fit and I made my escape. I left everything I owned behind in "the dungeon", but as least I still had "me" and that was the most important asset—my life. I walked hurriedly to my meeting destination which seemed like eternity to get there (about a mile), but when I arrived at that shopping center, my rescuer Teresa was there! I was free! Free from domestic violence. Enough. No more!

When I arrived at the women's shelter and immediately was led to a room for case intake. I was asked many questions pertaining to my home life situation and had to recall events and incidents involving domestic violence in the home. I signed numerous papers regarding the policies of the shelter and was provided with numerous pieces of literature regarding services available to domestic violence victims.

After this process, I was escorted to my assigned dormitory. I would share a room with three other IPV victims. I was in the wing where women with no children were housed. There were many rules in the shelter including when you could use your cell phone and only in a designated area was cell phone use allowed. There were hours as well in which residents were allowed to watch television in the common living room; use the computer lab—one resident at a time for a period of one hour; allowed to wash laundry at a scheduled time once a week, etc. The women living in the shelter were responsible for the daily cleaning of the facility; so everyone was assigned two daily chores.

The most significant service that the shelter provided me was a safe place to live while I worked to resume normalcy in my life. In this quest to recovery, the shelter offered housing, meals, clothing, toiletries, transportation to medical appointments, court advocate, legal assistance, small group counseling, weekly individual counseling, mandatory classes on parenting, self-care, budget management, safety planning, and a host of other topics of interest. As a gainfully employed woman living in the shelter, during my stay I did not qualify for any of the free services of legal, medical, government housing and other government supported programs.

When the month of January arrived, I met with my boss, the meeting centered on the information I was willing to provide him about my personal situation. He listened intently. He asked few questions. I noticed that he was nervous and I could sense he was uncomfortable with me. The meeting was short. A day or two later, he contacted me to let me know that I was due for my third year review but I could request an extension. He gave me the information I needed to initiate the process to request the extension.

On the day that I went to his office to secure his signature on the form and submit the form, he quickly signed my form and expressed, "Most will not contest the decision of a committee." My retort to him was, "Are you writing me off? Because it sounds like you are." I was quite surprised those words came out of my mouth. The semester began and my communication with him was distant. I still noticed his being uncomfortable around me. Several weeks later I learned that my request for an extension had been approved.

Soon after, I noticed that another university administrator, who worked collegially with my boss seemed to be deliberately avoiding me. I noticed this because before he had been cordial and friendly towards me and would always greet me. Now I noticed that he would look the other way when he saw me in the same room or hallway. I recall one instance that it really bothered me. I was attending a staff recognition luncheon and this university administrator shook hands with every person sitting at the table with me. When it was my turn to shake his hand, he turned away and went to the next table. It was that incident that I realized I probably did not have the support to retain my position because this administrator would ultimately be responsible for signing off any paperwork involving my continued employment.

Other employer personnel representing Human Resources, Police Department, Employee Assistance Program, Office of Equal Opportunity Services, and Technology Services reached out to me. Each person that I spoke to offered support and made me aware of services available to me to aid me. The Police Department provided escort service upon arrival and at departure from work. The Chief of Police checked on me periodically about my protection order and stayed informed about the legal process surrounding the court case, as I had filed for divorce and charges against him for violence against a family member. Technology Services ensured that my name and any identifiable information about me were removed from the employer website. The name plate to my office door was removed. Human Resources personnel were very attentive to my needs each time I paid a visit to handle a personal matter or contacted them by telephone. There were numerous systems of support provided by my employer immediately after notifying my boss of my personal situation, but the greatest support I received came from my direct supervisor. He ensured that all my needs and concerns were met particularly regarding my personal safety. When he came across something that he needed to question related to my work situation, he immediately contacted me to verify or seek guidance on how to address the matter on my behalf. He communicated with me constantly and consistently. I found that he was always attentive to matters pertaining to my privacy and confidentiality surrounding workplace accommodations as he ensured to verify that others responsible for tasks related to the workplace were taking care of matters on my behalf when it became necessary. An example of this is when he discovered that my name and classroom location were appearing on the course registration schedule. He immediately contacted the corresponding office to request the removal of my name from the online course registration records and replacing with the name of "staff." That is just one example of his support and there are numerous to examples to cite. To this day, almost three years later, my direct supervisor still shows concern and compassion towards me but I find that this gesture has helped to transform me to become better at my craft and serves as a validation that I am a valuable member of the team. With all respect, I label him an exceptional school leader.

Another crucial personal task I had to accomplish was to restore my credibility among my coworkers. I knew that I had to reach out to two key faculty members who were influential. I had to explain my behavior (as I was certain they had heard the complaints about me) and tell them my story of surviving domestic violence. At the first faculty meeting in January, I sought out both of these highly respected faculty members and asked to speak to them individually and privately.

The first faculty member I spoke to had been a member on the search committee when I interviewed for my position three years earlier. She had been charged with escorting me to the different appointments on the day of the interview. Even though we never spoke at length, she was always friendly and would greet me when we saw each other. After I disclosed to her my situation, she offered support. The most beautiful gesture that resulted from me revealing my personal situation to her is that she took me under her wing and began to mentor me. She provided support and care when I most needed to feel validated.

Two years later after that talk, our relationship has developed into friendship, but most importantly, I still consider her my mentor and hold her in extreme high regard with the utmost respect.

The other faculty member who I had to tell had been my direct supervisor when I began my employment. Although I was surprised, she never questioned my odd behavior as she had been familiar with my work performance and work ethic, and I had developed a working relationship with her. She had been present at most of the meetings where I acted aloof. After making her aware of the circumstances that led to my living in a shelter, I recall telling her, "All I needed was someone to ask me how I was doing." She was apologetic and sincere in her care expressed to me. From then onward, she always made sure to check in with me to ask me how I was doing and if I needed any support.

Immediately upon my return as a free, independent professional woman, I began to work tirelessly to regain my credibility. I resumed teaching my classes with a dedicated passion by providing high quality learning experiences for my graduate level students. I made sure that I was available to my students and colleagues so I checked my email daily and frequently. Every time I heard the notification signal on my cell phone, I knew I had to stop and check the incoming email message. I was going to make sure that there were no more complaints about me from students or coworkers. I became more visible by being on campus more often; volunteering and attending events; participating in committee work. I saw my boss frequently and I then noticed that he seemed more relaxed around me. He was friendlier when he saw me. He even inquired to how things were going. He seemed interested in hearing about my classes.

Fast forward one year after coming out of the dark shadows and resuming normalcy in my professional work life, to my greatest surprise, I received by email containing a recommendation letter from my boss for my records. It was a recommendation letter that was quite lengthy and very complimentary of my work as a member of the faculty. It was a copy of the recommendation letter he had written to support my three-year review. This is when I knew that I had regained my boss's support. Since restarting a life of normalcy without domestic violence, I returned to my profession with renewed energy and resumed my passion for teaching. I was named the recipient of our School's annual Outstanding Teaching Faculty Award; elected by my School's colleagues to represent them in the faculty university governing board, and am currently serving my second two-year term as my School's representative for a crucial university committee in which I was elected as its Chair for the second consecutive year. As for my teaching, I am most proud of the remarks students share with me such as, "*Thank you so much for all of your help, understanding, compassion, and guidance throughout my degree. I am very blessed to have had you as a professor and a mentor;*" or, "*You have been instrumental in equipping me with the knowledge and confidence to begin applying to positions. Thank you for investing in me as your student, and I am blessed and forever grateful that I have learned from you and will continue to learn from you. I could not have asked for a better, more qualified professor and mentor;*" and "*I want to tell you thank you so much for always getting all of us students so well prepared and informed. You have truly been my greatest mentor through this program.*"

It is through the support of my employer that allows me, an educator, a survivor from domestic violence—to no longer be shameful of the dirty little secret of having been a domestic violence victim. I am not a victim—no more. I am a survivor.

### **3.2 Relationships with Research**

Domestic violence or intimate physical violence (IPV) is a serious social dilemma and is a problem in the workplace, particularly when statistics indicate that 95% of reported IPV incidents involve a woman. Statistics related to domestic violence indicate that at least one in every three women will experience physical or sexual abuse during her lifetime (CDC, 2011). The Federal Bureau of Investigations has estimated that a woman is beaten every nine seconds in the United States (LaVan, Lopez, Katz & Martin, 2012). If we look in the classrooms across the United States, we will find women at the helm as teachers. Therefore, instructional school leaders, school managers, and school professionals need to recognize the spillover of domestic violence as a workplace matter.

When domestic violence is present in the home, studies have shown that IPV has a profound impact on the IPV victim functioning as a productive and effective employee. This was the case with the subject in this case study. Mental and physical health problems influenced the IPV's capacity to complete work and to perform effectively on the job (Katula, 2012; Katula, 2009; Tolman & Rosen, 2001). Employee absenteeism, diminished productivity, employee turnover are some of the major issues related to domestic violence (Felblinger & Gates, 2008; Swanberg & Logan, 2005). Most of these problems were reflected in the subject's personal story (Alaniz & De Los Santos, 2015).

In spite of the financial, legal, and employee health outcomes, research findings show that the response from employers to address IPV in the workplace have been gradual (Swanberg & Logan, 2005). Employers have viewed IPV as a classified matter that is not to be handled at work. However, as incidents occur that affect the workplace; employers can no longer avoid addressing domestic violence, particularly in schools.

In 2007, a group of 200 CEOs participated in a study to determine their level of domestic violence awareness. This study commissioned by Liz Claiborne Inc. revealed that most of the survey participants agreed that domestic violence was a significant concern. When asked if domestic violence was a problem at their respective companies, 71 percent indicated it was not a problem; however, thirteen percent of the survey participants reported that companies should play a major role in addressing domestic violence (Meinert, 2011).

Yet, another study conducted by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010) disclosed that 70 percent of companies surveyed indicated they did not have formal workplace violence prevention programs established. Of the 30 percent that reported they did offer such programs; fewer than half of these companies reported they had workplace policies to address domestic violence (Meinert, 2011). Another study led by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) reported that over 70% of workplaces do not have a formal workplace violence prevention program or policy in place even though domestic violence accounts for one of the four types of workplace violence typologies identified by OSHA (CDC, 2004). OSHA considers workplace violence an occupational hazard that can be prevented or minimized with appropriate precautions (Moldenauer, 2015). Still, a survey of Fortune 1500 executives acknowledged that IPV affects their businesses' productivity, yet only 13% believed that employers have a major role in addressing the issue (Samuel, Tudor, Weinstein, Moss, & Glass, 2011).

Across the United States, many women are employed today than in the past. Employers have an obligation to make available a safe environment for all its employees. Employers must now deliberate how to create a safe place supporting victims of IPV (Katula, 2012). Employers who are proactive in their method of opposing IPV can improve productivity, enhance the safety of employees, decrease absenteeism, reduce financial losses, and minimize liability (Johnson & Gardner, 1999).

#### **4. Discussions**

The success of student academic learning lies heavily on classroom teachers charged to impart quality instruction. Statistics show that the teaching profession is comprised predominately of women while at the same time statistics from various groups advocating and promoting domestic violence awareness reflect that domestic violence is rampant against women. With the statistics of IPV at the forefront, instructional school leaders, school managers and school professionals should be cognizant of the domestic violence indicators in the workplace and be prepared to offer support as the responsibility of an employer.

The best approach that instructional school leaders, managers of schools and school professionals can do is to implement workplace policy on how to intervene and respond to domestic violence issues involving employees who are victims. Domestic violence awareness and prevention intervention information produced by The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention can be made available to school employees to help bring awareness of this social issue and can be used for training purposes in recognizing, reporting, and appropriately responding to victims of domestic violence.

Assistance and support to an IPV victim can be made by referring the employee victim to the Employee Assistance Programs; provide leave, including Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (US Dept of Labor, 2017); provide job reassignment if necessary; allow for flexible scheduling; and promote and support enhanced benefits for employees. Additionally, as employers, instructional school leaders and managers of schools provide domestic awareness training to staff; train on referral to applicable resources; train to avoid legal risks; and provide safety and security to all employees (LaVan, et al, 2012).

It is important for an instructional school leader, school manager, and school professional to be aware that expressing concern by discussing the employee's decline in work performance, and asking, "Are you okay" can be sufficient to empower the employee to reveal she needs help. The instructional school leader, school manager, and school professional should reassure the employee by providing a listening ear and make certain that the employee understands that the information shared will be kept confidential among peer colleagues, but will need to be revealed to employer staff with a "need to know" such as the designated personnel in human resources, employee benefits, technology, safety and security departments and respective leadership team.

Usually with the collaborative efforts of all necessary involved department personnel, guidance and recommendations will be made available to guide and support the IPV victim employee in acquiring the help needed to become free and safe from the domestic violence. In the majority of cases, each respective department will have its own "To Do" tasks and one will involve contacting the IPV employee victim to offer support and provide important needed information to the IPV employee victim. Doing so sends the message that someone cares and this action may save a life.

## **5. Conclusions**

Domestic violence is a serious epidemic. Employers can no longer regard domestic violence as a "private" personal business matter with little or no impact on the workplace (Mollica & Danehower, 2014). According to data reported, no employer, whether it is a business, a corporation, or even a school system is protected from the impact of domestic violence in the workplace. The spillover effects of domestic violence have serious consequences for the workplace (LaVan, et al, 2012). Domestic violence is a serious, recognizable, and preventable massive social problem and 95 percent of reported domestic violence cases are women. Similar to other workplace health and safety issues, domestic violence needs to be addressed by employers. According to Raeder (2006), a congressional poll showed that 92% of women in the United States believe that fighting sexual and domestic violence should be a top workplace policy priority. This was a higher percentage than those who chose health care, childcare, or any other social issue.

IPV victims who are educated, earn a high-wage or hold a high-status position have an unusual set of struggles in comparison to their counterparts. Women in this group are deemed silent victims because they are seen as having an adequate education, sufficient money, and ample resources to remove themselves from the abuse. Because of this belief and the stigma associated with IPV, these "silent" victims often do not report the abuse, do not utilize employee assistance programs, nor take a leave of absence. These victims want to be seen as school professional, competent, and in control, and fear being viewed as helpless, showing faults, and unable to manage personal situations if they seek help for IPV (Kwesiga, Bell, Pattie, & Moe, 2007).

According to the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (Standard #3), instructional school leaders and managers of schools have an obligation to ensure effective "management of the organization, operation, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment" (CCSSO, 2008). Therefore, a domestic violence prevention intervention program supported by workplace policy to respond to IPV victims should be developed. Instructional school leaders, managers of schools and school professionals who are proactive and prepared to address domestic violence when it involves an employee could lead to empowering the IPV victim to step out of the dark shadows from domestic violence. Establishing a workplace policy, enacting procedures, creating a network of resources and promoting a culture that is intolerant of domestic violence are good sound business practices. These policies could potentially save a life—a teacher's life. They can make all the difference in the life of a domestic violence victim.

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